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Abdul Hameed Lone

AKU-IED Professional Development Centre, Northern Areas, Pakistan

Abdul Jahan

AKU-IED Professional Development Centre, Northern Areas, Pakistan

Anila Kiani

AKU-IED Professional Development Centre, Northern Areas, Pakistan

Bahadur Ali Khan

AKU-IED Professional Development Centre, Northern Areas, Pakistan

Safida Ayoub

AKU-IED Professional Development Centre, Northern Areas, Pakistan

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Abdul Hameed Lone, Abdul Jahan, Anila Kiani, Bahadur Ali Khan, Safida Ayoub, and Shakoor Muhammad

IMPACT: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*Abdul Hameed Lone, Abdul Jahan, Anila Kiani,
Bahadur Ali Khan, Safida Ayoub, & Shakoor Muhammed
AKU-IED Professional Development Centre, Northern Areas, Pakistan*

Abstract

The purpose of this document is to explore the diversity of perspectives on school improvement. It also chronicles the programme activities at PDCN, the rationale and evolution of the model Whole School Improvement Programme (WSIP), and the process and modus operandi of the working team of PDCN. It also portrays the modified version of WSIP, its impact on school improvement and the challenges that have emerged from it, along with our recommendations for further improvement.

PDCN at a glance

PDCN started functioning in 1999 from a rented building and moved as soon as the present premises were ready, in October 2000. The explicit purpose of establishing this institution was to provide a centre of excellence for educational professionals in Northern Areas and is a joint venture between Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) and the Aga Khan Educational Services, Pakistan (AKES,P) and is managed by AKU-IED. The project is funded by the European Commission and has entered into the second five-year phase of NPEP. The faculty members of PDCN are MEd graduates from AKU-IED.

PDCN offers professional development programs and its activities are spread over selected school systems in all districts of Northern Areas such as Gilgit, Skardu, Ghizer, Diamer and Ganche. It develops capacity, offers programmes and does research in collaboration with its main partners, AKES,P, the government and the private sector.

It mostly offers two types of courses: Courses certified by the AKU-IED and those by PDCN. By the end of 2002, the percentage of stakeholders' participation in AKU-IED and PDCN certified courses are as follows:

AKU-IED Certified Courses: AKES, P = 53.4%
Govt = 39.6%
Others = 07.0%

PDCN Certified Courses: AKES, P = 26.0%
Govt = 49.7%
Others = 24.3%

Mission statement

The mission of the PDCN is to develop and adopt activities and strategies that will lead to an improvement in the quality of education in the Northern Areas. We aim to work in partnership with government and local organizations, build local capacity, conduct research to test ideas and influence policy, and develop assessment and evaluation procedures in order to improve practice and help identify what works and why.

The Whole School Improvement Programme (WSIP)

The Whole School Improvement Programme (WSIP) has been PDCN's 'flagship' programme since 1999. It addresses the dilemma that newly-acquired skills often erode and the status quo is re-established. PDCN supports the point of view that there is little teacher development without school development. Effectiveness is enhanced if schools and newly trained individuals are able to move forward at the same pace.

WSIP focuses on the following six areas to improve schools as a whole:

- Quality of Teaching and Learning
- Leadership, Management and Administration
- Curriculum and Staff Development
- Community Participation
- Building, Accommodation and Resources
- Social and Moral Development, and Health Education

Programmatic activities

Apart from the WSIP, the PDCN offers a Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management courses for head teachers of WSIP, and some head teachers of non-

WSIP schools to develop their leadership and management skills in tandem with other school improvement-related activities. It also offers a Certificate in Education (CE): Social Studies, for teachers. PDCN provides a venue for discussions on initiatives taken by other departments in line with the quality of education in the Northern Areas. Such discussions are held in the form of Educational Forums, which are now referred to as Policy Dialogue. The Women Support Group is another programmatic activity that the PDCN initiated to supplement working-women in the Northern Areas. It also provides Short Awareness Courses for the teachers of partner organizations in order to give them an awareness of gist of activities in terms of quality education.

In collaboration with its chief partners and at the request of various organizations, the PDCN has offered the following need-based courses to these organizations:

- Educational Leadership and Management workshops for middle management and high officials of the government educational department
- Mentoring programmes for mentors of all partners
- Special workshops for various schools i.e. Army Public school, Al-Mustafa Public school and HERP
- Courses for teachers associated with the World Wide Fund, Pakistan (WWF)
- Urdu language teaching workshops for PDCN faculty, Government and AKESP.

Research

The following research projects are presently under way or have recently been completed:

- Mapping Changes: A study of the effects of the WSIP and CEM programmes
- An Investigation into the Effectiveness of an Environmental Education Programme
- The Spread of the use of the English language in Two Districts of the Northern Areas: A Comparative Study of the Impact of WSIP, 2000 - 2002
- The meaning of the construction 'English' in English-Medium Private Schools in the Northern Area.

PDCN also hosts the USAID Project IV of AKU-IED, which documents the best practices in community-managed schools, as well as investigates multi-grade teaching in the Northern Areas.

Achievements 2000 - 2003					
Programme / Activity	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
WSIP Graduates	84	103	104	124	415
CELM Graduates	21	25	29	25	100
CE Graduates	--	25	--	23	48
Short Awareness Course	56	54	58	60	228
All Other Programmes**	--	18	160	110	288
Grand Total	--	--	--	--	1079

Rationale and evolution of WSIP in Northern Areas of Pakistan

Before the establishment of the PDCN, a lot of impressive teacher training programmes had been launched in the Northern Areas. These programmes included the Field-Based Teacher Development Program (FBTD), Language Enhancement and Achievement Program (LEAP), Northern Areas Education Project (NAEP) and the MEd and VT at the AKU-IED.

PDCN emerged as a center of excellence and a successful joint venture between AKES,P and AKU-IED, both having an innovative approach of professional development as well as school improvement in the region.

Before the formal functioning of the PDCN, a group of PDTs carried out a *Needs Analysis Survey* in all five districts of the Northern Areas. The survey revealed that the training courses did not have the expected impact on teaching and learning in schools as, according to the stakeholders, the theoretical aspects of training courses did not dovetail with practicality in actual context. Thus, PDCN needed to have a model that would meet such challenges and one that could make a difference in terms of teaching and learning and improving schools in Northern Areas. To that end, PDCN had a three-day Stakeholders' Conference from the 15th to the 17th of June, 1999 with education providers (AKES, Govt. and NGOs) to share findings and develop a common understanding to adapt this model to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

On the basis of findings from the Stakeholders' Conference, the PDCN was given a

mandate to launch the WSIP as a strategy to bring about a positive change to the school contexts in the Northern Areas. This approach seemed quite appropriate, especially as the head of PDCN had experience with the aforementioned model, working in Kampala and Uganda, East Africa.

The conceptual framework that underpins the WSIP is derived from research studies on school effectiveness (Hopkins, 1990; Levine & Lezotte, 1990) and school improvement (Stoll & Fink, 1996). The main principle of the WSIP is to treat the school as the unit of training, rather than the individual, with the long-term aim being the development of effective group dynamics and collegiality amongst teachers, students and communities for the purpose of ongoing educational dialogue and improvement. The six main aspects of school improvement mentioned earlier, should be addressed concurrently.

Before the PDCN started its work, teacher training was thought to be the way to improve children's learning. Often teachers were taken away from their schools for training, and then sent back to implement the new style of teaching. The objective of the WSIP approach is to go beyond individual teacher training, and to improve an entire school as a whole. It is a time and energy intensive approach, in which PDTs work in the school with heads, teachers and students together. Our exposition of the six areas shows that many aspects of a school must be improved simultaneously if the situation of the school is to really change. It is for these reasons that we, the Professional Development Teachers (PDTs), work alongside teachers, heads and pupils within their contexts, to find appropriate strategies for improvement.

WSIP pilot programme

Before direct intervention, it was decided to go through the process of piloting, in order to test the model, assess challenges encountered and most importantly, to professionally develop the team. There were eight schools in the pilot project: three government schools, three AKES,P and two private schools. The teachers in these schools worked with PDTs, for the equivalent of two days a week and attended weekly workshops after school hours. The PDTs worked as colleagues, critical friends, master trainers and resource persons. The process proceeded with the following steps:

Orientation workshop

The heads of these schools attended a three-day Management Training workshop at the onset of the program followed by a two-day workshop at the end of the pilot project.

The chairs of the school committee attended one session to learn about the WSIP and to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). It needs to be emphasized that because the pilot project was only eight weeks long, findings could not be generalized. However, it did help us raise issues, pose questions, identify obstacles and celebrate small successes.

A special workshop was conducted about the AKES,P and AKU-IED Programme and the exposition of the role and function of the PDCN. Their initial perceptions of WSIP were elicited here. The six areas of school effectiveness were introduced and translated by the participants. We wanted all the members of the teaching staff to understand the philosophy and process of the WSIP before we started. The session provided an opportunity to be self-critical and retrospective as well as prospective. We wanted to present some practical examples of the fundamental changes we were trying to introduce in schools. Teachers hesitated to try out strategies, since they had not experienced such themselves. We wanted to give teachers the experience of working with literature, to enrich the curriculum and their own understanding to encourage them to try this particular teaching method with their own students.

Material making / resources development

Schools in the Northern Areas are not supplied with sufficient material to provide quality education to children. We wanted to show that ‘no-cost’ and ‘somewhat-cost’ resources are necessary to improve schools as a whole. We wanted teachers and head teachers to think about how they could obtain such material for their schools when the WSIP was over. We were planning on a ground where schools are not treated as learning organizations. The lack of collaboration among various stakeholders involved has developed a fragile culture within the systems.

Our critical learning from piloting the WSIP:

It was obvious that the WSIP would not be the answer to all the ills that beset schools. WSIP is very time consuming and resource extensive and it requires patience on the part of the PDTs as well as a lengthy time period to bring about changes that often result in unpredictable outcomes. (Educational Forum on WSIP-pilot, March 2002).

We also learned that if we wanted sustainable improvement or change, the following areas would need more attention:

- The responsibility for professional development must rest with individual professionals

or stakeholders

- School leadership and management need to focus more on providing support
- Monitoring, supervision and professional support
- Raising community awareness and sharing responsibility for the learning of children

Follow-up and support mechanism

The opportunity for teachers to improve themselves is an important element that is absent in the entire process, and there is also a lack of an in-house professional development culture in schools. Other shortcomings include the absence of merit-based appointments and a shortage of physical and human resource in-terms of building and staff.

We learned that the model of the WSIP would not succeed in an educational climate, one that does not provide schools with the necessary support. We aimed to continue refining the model, but argued that lack of content knowledge; weak leadership, a poor school climate and a weak infrastructure were our biggest challenges.

Amongst these six areas of the school improvement, leadership and management is one of the most important aspects of the WSIP.

Our pilot experience revealed that motivation and effective involvement of head teachers would have a positive impact on the staff's working style. During school visits where the heads worked with PDTs and supported teachers in attending workshops regularly, preparing lessons and enriching textbooks and curriculum, both the teachers as well as the students became enthusiastic and were motivated to learn.

We worked to provide an effective learning environment and attempted to influence policy but at the end of the day, this was difficult because other partners did not execute their responsibilities effectively. School Improvement and sustainability requires team-work, honest partners and genuine efforts to bring about a positive change.

Process of WSIP and modus operandi of the team:

WSIP is a process where the first year entails extensive fieldwork. It begins from December and ends in the same month of the next year, continued with a two-year follow up in the related schools and encompasses the following steps:

Selection of schools

WSIP begins with school selection procedure, where faculty members meet the heads of the concerned departments (government. education department, AKES, P and private sector) to seek their permission for school selection. Schools are selected according to certain criteria, which include:

- schools that are close to each other in order to form a cluster where teachers from all schools can easily assemble to attend weekly workshops;
- an equal ratio of schools from all sectors (Government, AKES,P and Private);
- a balanced ratio of male and female teachers in schools;
- good strength of male and female students in the schools
- a willingness to work in deserving schools, where the PDCN's intervention is needed; and
- the whole staff's willingness to partake in the WSIP's objectives.

Selection of Master Trainers

Short-listed Master Trainers from partner institutions on a need basis are selected by faculty members. They are interviewed at PDCN and selected MTs are given contracts along with their job descriptions.

Orientation for the selected school teachers

Teachers from selected schools are invited to attend the orientation workshop at PDCN for the purpose of getting them familiar with the philosophy behind WSIP and also to pave the path for working with them in field operations. Orientation workshops are usually held in December and January when schools are off and the PDCN team is nearly ready to have its intervention in the field. Certain themes are covered in the orientation and teachers are in the position to highlight school-related issues and possibly their solutions when they get back. Thus it helps the faculty to establish a working relationship with teachers before the actual WSIP intervention.

Baseline survey

Before launching the WSIP activities in the schools, a base line survey of the schools is conducted where the existing situation (overall physical environment and structure) of the schools is video recorded and photographs are taken for purpose of logging the

survey. Faculty members interview teachers, head teachers and community members using structured forms and get information about physical structure of schools, management and administration, the nature of community involvement and teaching and learning and their working relationship at the academic level. The main purpose of the baseline survey is to keep records of each school and see the difference by way of comparison at the end of WSIP process. It also helps faculty members give priority to particular areas of improvement and think about basic questions of where to start and how to start.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Faculty members with the help of head teachers hold meetings with School Management Committees (SMCs) and Village Education Committees (VECs) or Parents Teachers Association (PTA) before formally commencing WSIP activities in schools. During these meetings members are briefed about the WSIP's whole process. The initial meeting is one of the ways to involve community representatives in the process. The members sign a Memorandum of Understanding, which means that they agree with the process and activities of WSIP.

Intensive working procedure in schools

Faculty members then undertake certain activities in the project schools. Usually the following six areas are focused in the process:

Teaching and learning

In the first few days, teachers are observed so that the existing practice in the schools is known. Faculty members and MTs then help teachers in planning their lessons and provide constructive feedback on their lessons. We demonstrate lessons in the classes in presence of teachers, do pair / team-teaching and help them in enhancing content knowledge and methodology.

Leadership and management

Head teachers from project schools are simultaneously involved in the CELM course and the WSIP course. Thus head teachers get a wider learning experience to be pedagogical leaders in the school context. Curriculum and Staff Development

Using mobile library books and other reference books that are provided by the PDCN

enriches the national curriculum. Teachers are urged to maintain reflective journals to keep a record of their practices and through doing that learn more about their profession. Weekly workshops are conducted for the project schools' teachers at any one school. Different articles on teaching and learning related to school improvement are handed out to the teachers and they are encouraged to thoroughly read and discuss them.

Community participation

Community participation is ensured through different ways and means. Mothers' Day is celebrated in schools and mothers are encouraged to visit schools and witness the teaching and learning process in the classrooms. Meetings with mothers on a class basis are arranged to discuss particular issues. Faculty members and head teachers hold meetings with SMCs / VECs and PTAs. Community mobilizers are selected to work for schools.

Building, accommodation and resources

The PDCN team works on creating possible space for establishing a library/resource room. It also tries to arrange shelter for classes that are conducted in an open-air environment. Vacating staff rooms and merging staff members into head teachers' office, along with making portions in the classes, if possible. In most cases head teachers have separate offices and there are separate staff rooms for teachers and also separate offices for school secretaries while children are seen sitting outside in the scorching heat and severe cold. In such cases changes are made with the consensus of head teachers and teachers. The PDCN team also tries to develop resources and works on how to utilize available resources in a better way to make teaching and learning meaningful.

Social and moral development of children and health education

Stories are told during class sessions for the purpose of cultivating a sense of morality in children. Students are encouraged to read library books and share information with their colleagues during the assembly. Speeches are delivered in the assembly and students are given a chance to express themselves in the morning assembly. A fortnightly or monthly Buzm-e-Adab is also managed during which children present different activities and are encouraged to take part in turns. Workshops on health education for teachers, community members/mothers are conducted in schools and teachers are encouraged to have such sessions in their classes. Guest speakers are invited from the health sector to talk about health education to give more awareness to children, teachers and mothers.

Mobile Library Service

PDCN provides hundreds of books to the project schools on a fortnightly basis, a process that continues for three years. The main purpose of providing the mobile service is to develop a reading culture among students and teachers of Northern Areas.

Action research in schools

Project teachers are involved in action research as part of their assignment for certification. Through action research, teachers try to resolve school related issues and thus move a step ahead towards school improvement.

Reinforcement workshops

At the end of the academic year teachers are invited to the PDCN to attend reinforcement workshops, which are subject based. This is done in addition to subject-based workshops, which are conducted in the field on a school cluster basis. Report Writing

Faculty members write mid term and final reports on each school about each and every activity, the impact of WSIP, and challenges encountered, teachers' efforts, their plus points and flaws along with recommendations for further improvement.

Certification of CPs

At the end of the academic year, teachers and head teachers who meet the criteria ,are certified by AKU-IED. This certification means the completion of given assignments; 95% attendance, punctuality, showing interest and commitment in school improvement and maintaining reflective journals.

Follow-up of WSIP

The PDCN continues its support in terms of conducting follow-ups on a fortnightly basis and offering the mobile library service for the subsequent two years.

Evolving models of WSIP at PDCN

The model at the beginning of WSIP and up to 2001

As mentioned earlier, the WSIP has a school-based focus for a period of at least one

academic year, continued with less intensive support in the second and third year. It is for these reasons that a pair of the Professional Development Teachers (PDTs) worked in each of the clusters (in the field) for four days in a week in the process of WSIP. On Fridays, the PDTs came back from the field to attend Friday sessions in order to share their field experiences. This model was followed during 2000 to 2001.

Modified model in 2002

In the year 2002, the working pattern undertaken by the PDTs in the field was modified slightly where the selected teachers and head teachers were involved in an orientation workshop at the PDCN before its formal intervention in schools. It was done to make CPs aware of the philosophy of WSIP and to establish a strong working relationship with them. Following the model, one of the faculty members worked in each of the clusters along with two Master Trainers (AKES, P and Government) for three weeks. The purpose of involving MTs was to prepare them for working on school improvement in their systems in future. After three weeks of intensive fieldwork, the team (faculty and MTs) came back to the PDCN and spent a whole week sharing field experiences with other faculty members and planning for the next three weeks' fieldwork.

Further modification in 2003

On the basis of field experiences during WSIP-2002, the working pattern in the field was modified. In the new model, the working duration in the field is two weeks and the remaining two are spent at the PDCN. The rest of the working pattern is more or less the same as follows:

- Involving teachers, head teachers and MTs in orientation workshops at the PDCN over the course of ten days.
- Following the orientation, one of the faculty members works in each of the clusters along with 3 / 4 Master Trainers from (AKES, Pakistan, Govt. organizations and NGOs.) for two weeks (up to 6 days per week) .
- During field operations, faculty members and MTs document the ongoing activities and develop their reflections. After two weeks of an intensive intervention in the schools, faculty members come back to the PDCN and spend a week in following up on schools from the 2002 session, and an additional week on their professional development and planning for the next two weeks fieldwork. Meanwhile, the MTs carry out fieldwork in schools and come to the PDCN during each alternate month. This working pattern continues for the whole academic year.

Impact of PDCN's programmes

Any kind of effort or contribution always creates a positive or negative change to make a difference in the culture, beliefs, and practices of human beings. As a team of professionals, we also made efforts to make a difference in terms of bringing about a change in the context of the Northern Areas of Pakistan. These claims are not based on formal research but are based on faculty members' observations, evidence from reflections, reports and field notes. The following narration reveals the impact of PDCN's intervention through PDTs in the field of education:

Classroom teaching and learning process

In order to bring about improvement in schools, the first and foremost aim is to change the teaching and learning process. Keeping this in mind, we selected a specified number of schools to test new ideas and methodologies to watch and learn what works, why and how. As a team, we realized that going to the school and working with the teachers there brings home the realities of educational issues.

On-the-job training

On the job, we offered training in terms of demonstration, team teaching, co-planning, debriefing sessions, developing resources and their utilization in classrooms. Ultimately, teachers used the ideas and continued to carry them out in a similar way. We regarded the practice of one class-one teacher as an essential foundation of learning. Making portfolios and involving mothers in preparing low cost materials had a great impact on students' learning. One of the mothers shared her experiences with the faculty saying her child (class one) came home from school and said that he would need her help. She agreed but asked how she could help him. He brought a piece of paper and asked her to help him draw a picture of an animal. They drew one and the next day, he went to school very happily. She said, "Now he is so enthusiastic in sharing academic activities with me and I too look forward to hearing him out. . Both of us enjoy his schooling now" (faculty's field notes - dated June 7, 2003).

Conducting weekly workshops after school hours without disturbing teachers' and students' routine work was a great opportunity for teachers to equip themselves professionally. Ultimately, schools, where the staff worked according to the conceptual framework, became learning organizations because of the sharing spirit, learning from each other, solving one another's problems and making important decisions. As a team

we realized and noticed that there was turbulence and differences in the school culture in respect of making friends, building teams, responsibility, motivation and commitment with the school. By way of example, a head teacher and a teacher of a girl's school were transferred twice. They requested the ADI not to transfer them because they had put in a lot of efforts into making the school move as a team. If one or two were to be transferred, then the school would decline again. This indicates their intrinsic motivation and commitment to improve their school.

Mobile Library Services

Evidence revealed that the mobile library system had developed a reading culture among teachers and students to quite an extent. Now when we talk to children about what they read in the books that were provided, they can effectively narrate a gist of the stories in them along with remembering the authors' name and the title of books. We also observed that teachers now use library books in their classes to enrich textbook stories and other topics. The library services strengthened the PDCN's mission to demonstrate and differentiate between curriculum, textbook and enrichment of knowledge through different sorts of books.

Students' learning outcomes

The focus of the PDCN was to develop students' conceptual understanding, rather than passing tests and examinations. However, we also knew that learning at school is exam-oriented. Keeping this in mind we considered moving within the framework of school systems and trying to enrich them with current ideas and methodologies. We mostly used storybooks in schools and showed teachers how to tell and teach stories and link them with students' prior knowledge and textbooks. Consequently, we observed that the students' level of confidence was greater and their understanding grew substantially and they were confident in expressing their feelings, experiences and understanding through retelling those stories, drawings, linking with their prior knowledge, asking some critical questions and participating in role playing.

Creativity in portfolio

We demonstrated and encouraged the teachers to bring about a change in their practices and maintain individual portfolios by keeping the records of their creative pieces of work. As time passed, we saw that there was a gradual improvement in students' creativity in terms of drawings about different characters of stories, science projects and other

subject related activities. It also helped incline parents towards children's learning when the portfolios were shared with them.

Improvement in results

In the majority of our WSIP schools; as the level of confidence, motivation and commitment had increased; there was an ultimate positive effect on students' results. For instance, results in nursery up to class two remained 90 % to 100 % specifically, and class three to five generally improved.

Professional attitude of teachers

Teachers developed a stronger awareness about their roles and responsibilities, adopting a positive working approach. They worked intensively even after school hours and worked in teams (subject-oriented) rather than in isolation. They also observed each other's lessons and gave constructive feedback to each other, which helped them in growing professionally. Teachers and head teachers were confident in conducting workshops for other colleagues when needed.

Teachers took the responsibility to prepare their lesson plans and learned how to arrange and utilize resources. WSIP bags were used purposefully and when the materials were finished, most of the teachers managed to replace them, which was a good sign in terms of sustainability.

Sometimes we would clean the classrooms, pick up litter from the floor and put them in dustbins, rather than wait for the maid or students to do so. We also sat on the floor with the children and facilitated groups to make the teaching and learning effective and more productive. Soon we observed that the egocentric behavior of teachers and head teachers changed into a positive professional working style.

Leadership and management

The Certificate in Education: Educational leadership and Management (CELM) program and the WSIP helped the head teachers develop a common understanding of generic and subject specific learning. These programmes, especially CELM, helped head teachers understand and develop a few skills in handling the change process, plan for school development, managing human and physical resources in their schools, building school teams, resolving conflicts, monitoring and evaluating pragmatic activities on the whole.

Both programmes played a vital role in bringing about changes and improvement. For instance, some of the heads of the schools developed a more amiable relationship with their staff, provided professional support, delegated tasks among staff members and empowered them. This kind of attitude not only develops motivation and commitment, but also influenced the whole culture of the schools and the outlook of the staff in order to share and learn from each other. Furthermore, there were also some implications of the leadership and management programme in schools. For example, introducing the “one-class, one-teacher” concept in schools and seeking clarification and support on school-related issues etc. when the faculty paid follow-up visits.

Evolving process

The emergence of the WSIP from the stakeholders’ conference and the offer of a Leadership and Management Programme from AKU-IED facilitated PDCN to find ways and means to experiment and test different sorts of ideas and methodologies. Our working style in the actual context of a school gradually strengthened our theoretical perspectives. The Friday sessions enabled our academic team to share its forte; areas for improvement, learning and further reflections opened ways and means to explore the process. This continued on in a cyclical manner like an action research model (e.g. plan, act, observe, reflect and re-plan.). Yet the process evolved programmes, activities, different methods and strategies and models. It generates hypotheses, rather than testing them. The process of working in the schools developed confidence in the AKES to start its own WSIP. Furthermore, the government requested the PDCN to plan for their WSIP 2004 (which is in the pipeline). This does not only indicate that the PDCN has won the trust of the system but also indicates that our working process has raised the expectations of the education providers.

Thrust for PDCN and our selective and reflective approach

PDCN has been growing and developing gradually and noticing a multiplier effect on different stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, communities, and education systems. We have been getting a lot of applications and requests for different programmes from different communities and NGOs. Therefore, we have been trying to be very selective and reflective in order to maintain the quality of our programmes. Before making decisions, we reflect collectively, argue and debate among our team in a professional way to avoid making mistakes erroneous decisions.

Working in real-time as professional growth

In order to develop on a personal and professional level, we recommend testing one's learning in a real classroom situation. This is because theoretical knowledge is something different from practical demonstration and it varies from context to context, as each context is unique. Therefore, one needs to test out ideas in order to see what works and what does not and that, then should be modified. Such an approach develops problem-solving and decision-making skills. Thus, we come to know how to deal with different stakeholders, manage and organize human and physical resources, resolve conflicts, monitor progress and performance and evaluate the whole process.

Love for children and empathy for human beings

Another innovative experience is that we have been serving different communities. This brings a variety of experience and diversity in the classroom. According to Fullan. M. (1999), "Diversity is strength". It becomes interesting when we go to the school after a long period of time. Different teachers comment, "It has been a long time since we saw you", "We waited for you", "We have been waiting for you", "and we missed you" (faculty' field notes on an on going basis).

Some of the staff's welcoming behavior becomes a great source of motivation and commitment to our profession. It gives us feedback that we have been doing a good job. Their friendliness enables us to pull through unfavorable conditions.

As a whole, if one wants to grow personally and professionally, WSIP's roots are powerful enough to allow us to achieve our professional goals. Ultimately, it has had a positive consequence for school improvement.

Challenges and constraints

Our working experience reveals that the WSIP and other programmatic activities of the PDCN had a profound impact but the journey and process of school improvement was not free of constraints. Some of the challenges we encountered, are briefly mentioned as follows:

- It was not easy to change the embedded school culture where teachers are usually not ready to leave their respective comfort zone and mostly they have a sense of dependency.

- Teachers have high expectations from faculty members and expect to have answers for every situation. Having limited subject expertise and without having any administrative authority and pressure it was difficult for PDTs to deal with every situation.
- The main issue was finding the time for planning or reflecting on taught and observed lessons. There were a limited number of teachers in schools and they too remained busy in teaching all the time and were reluctant to spare time after schools hours to discuss and plan lesson. Some of the teachers were opportunists and were in the habit of a “one day show”. In the presence of PDTs they did what was expected of them but in their absence, the teachers reverted back to whatever they used to do.
- Improper school buildings with small, dark and messy rooms were main hindrances to effective teaching and learning. In most schools, there were no heating arrangements in winter and it was not easy for teachers, students as well as for outsiders, to be involved in teaching and learning effectively.
- Having wide differences between schools / organizational policies and the philosophy of WSIP was a big challenge. Despite several presentations and debriefings, the system’s people were unable to understand and support WSIP, which sometimes, created frustrations for the PDCN team.
- An insufficient teaching staff, dependence on volunteer teachers and untimely transfer of employees and head teachers created big gaps in the WSIP working mechanism.
- English has been introduced at primary level in the government system but the teachers’ content knowledge is so weak that teaching English is a big issue in schools. It is even more challenging for those students who have moved to upper classes without learning English from the start and the content of such classes is beyond their capacity.
- Most of the teachers attend training courses but do not change their mentality and their way of working.
- The idea of involving master trainers in WSIP was to address the issue of sustainability. When they are back within the framework of the system, they are not involved accordingly.

Recommendations

Looking at the scenario of school improvement in the context of Northern Areas, we recommend the following:

- To ensure sustainability the partner institutions must understand the philosophy of

WSIP and encourage it in their respective systems to practice it honestly and professionally.

- WSIP Master Trainers must be involved in the areas for which they have been trained. They must be involved in initiating WSIP activities in their respective systems with full support from their superiors.
- Teachers as well as head teachers of the project schools should not be transferred for a certain period so as to sustain the initiatives taken in schools.

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